

Q What was the continental system and why did Napoleon try to enforce it after 1806? Why did he fail? Explain

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I.

Introduction:

Date: _____

The Continental system was a strategy which showed Napoleon's frustration of engagement in prolonged conflicts with Britain. After having been defeated in Battle of Trafalgar, 1805, Napoleon admitted that France could never win a sea battle with British empire as British ruled the sea's through its the then advanced shipping and trained navy. Thus, Napoleon started planning alternate methods to pull down British prowess and might and it was only through its economy, that Napoleon could achieve his goals. So, he designed an economic policy that any country in the Europe would not trade with Britain and if they did, a war ~~will~~ would be declared on them. Victor Hugo puts the economic might of France into following words:

"It is through her economy that England must be attacked, to leave her of her gains in Europe, Asia and America is to leave her of her arms, render conflict and was eternal. To destroy British economy is to strike England at heart."

II

Continental System

A. What was Continental System?

The Continental system was economic policy of Napoleon through which he aimed to stop British trade in Europe in order to

weaken it. He, in continental system, declared it to European state to align with him and boycott Britain.

B- Why France resorted to Continental system?

Britain was a part of every coalition formed against France and France under Napoleon defeated almost all major European powers but could not defeat England due to highly prosperous, advanced and industrialised society of Britain. Having realised that France could never subdue Britain in direct military conflict, thus Napoleon designed a policy to strike Britain's strength: its economy through trade war. It was, in real sense, the incapacity of France to defeat Britain in direct military conflict that it resorted to continental system.

III. The structures and Policies in Continental System

* Structure:

The Continental System is divided into three major decrees:

- a) The Berlin decree
- b) The Milan and Warsaw Decree
- c) The Fontainebleau Decree

* Policies under each Decree:

- The Berlin Decree (1806)

Any country which considers itself to be a friend of France should boycott the British goods

Any letter or parcel with British address should not be sent

Any British person on any allied states territory, if found, should be immediately arrested

- The Warsaw / Milan Decree (1807)

if any British good is found on any ship, the ship will immediately be seized by France.

- The Fontainebleau Decree (1810)

This decree declared that if any British goods are found in a country, they should immediately be burned in public.

IV Napoleon's intentions behind the Continental system

- I To strangle Britain by targeting its commerce and industrial economy
- II To unify continental Europe under France control and isolate Britain.
- III To exploit the French political revolution against British industrial Revolution.
- IV To introduce indirect methods of warfare and use trade as a method of war.
- V To hit British navy and assert French strategic dominance by halting British trade.

V British Response to Continental System: Order in Council

British responded to harsh policies of Napoleon by introducing Order in Council. It declared that all the ships trading through British routes must purchase a licence from Britain. In addition, if any country boycotted trade with Britain due to France will face consequences and further more, all French ships and the allied countries of France will be seized by navy of Britain.

VI

Impacts of Continental System which failed the system:

Date: _____

A.
→

Continental System led to wars in Europe

The continental system led to four major wars of Napoleon era, among which the Russian expedition proved to be fatal for Napoleon's career. When any of the European states would discard or no longer wanted to be on same line with Napoleon's continental policies due to their internal needs and social unrest, Napoleon would lodge a war against them.

1- Peninsular War (1807)

→ The Portugal and Spain gave up in continental policies. Napoleon invaded Spain and through Spain he made Portugal. This came way to social unrest in Spain and led to the resignation (forced) of monarchy and Portugal was made a part of France.

II - War with Pope (1806)

→ Pope did not agree much with Napoleon's policy thus he declared war against Pope which created feelings of hatred among local conservatives.

III - Annexation of Holland (1809)

→ Napoleon brother, Louis Bonaparte, the emperor of Holland continued trade with Britain because he found it hard to keep up with the policies. Napoleon removed him and annexed Holland.

IV - Russian Invasion (1810)

→ Napoleon invaded Russia because the Tsar of Russia gave up on the boycott because of the internal needs of Russian population. Yet, this invasion proved fatal for Napoleon and it led to the fall of his empire.

B. The failure of the Continental system in each country

On a larger level, the Continental system was a fail and it backfired in France.

•) Impacts on England (Failed)

→ British lost 42% of Export Market:

Although Britain lost 42% of its foreign market yet the continental system, did not harm it much because of British superiority over the seas.

→ British Explored alternate routes and markets:

British market did not collapse because its colonies served as its primary markets and the control over the seas, let

British explore new routes and markets: a factor which Napoleon had ignored.

• British export remained High:

The European countries dominance over the goods of British didn't allow Britain to suffer.

Thompson in his book Napoleon Bonaparte: His Rise and Fall (pg#235-36) mentions:

“In 1805, British traded 37% goods to Europe.

In 1806, 30%; 1807, 25%; 1808, 26%; 1809, 35%; 1810, 42% & the re-exported

goods from colonies to Europe were

76% (1805), 72% (1806), 80% (1807), 71% (1808), 75 (1809), 80% (1810)“

• Impacts of Continental System on France (Back-fired)

• The war economy of France weakened it: other than protectionism, France did not gain much from the continental system. The continuous declaration of wars weakened France's economy, exhausted its military and annoyed masses.

• Napoleon involvement in trade:

Another failure of the continental system was the Napoleons himself trade with England. He bought coats for his military from England and sold them grain for good prices which left the other European countries suspicious of Napoleon's intentions.

• The wars fought for Continental System cost Empire:

The peninsular war and Russian war in order to keep the continental system intact cost Napoleon his entire empire.

• It failed in Europe as well

The Continental system opened the channels of smuggling in Europe, deindustrialization, inflation and Public unrest which forced the rulers to go back to British trade.

VII

Analysis and Conclusion:

The Continental System failed because it was impossible for Napoleon to force European countries to boycott England. France could not impact British trade because she was the empress of seas and instead subdued French trade. Many European countries, even if they wanted to, could not keep the boycott for long because they were dependent on England for their basic necessities, and the continual trade policy infuriated Napoleon and attacked the European countries and lost his might in the process. Thus in nutshell, it was proved that if France was lion of the land, Britain was princess of seas eventually, leading to downfall of Napoleon through his own policy of continental system.